



Applied Linguistics and Literacy
in Africa and the Diaspora

An AILA Research Network
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Editor's Comment

Dear ReN Africa Members,

Welcome to the second edition of the 2014 newsletter of the Research Network on Applied Linguistics and Literacy in Africa and the Diaspora. This issue announces three calls for papers – on language and politics in Nigeria; digital civic engagement; and more broadly articles for the journal *Kuwala* of the African Academy of Languages.

New in this newsletter is the section *Commentary*, where Kathryn Philip writes about the possibilities of libraries for global information storage and dissemination. David Roberts shares some interesting reflections and observations on tone marking, a very important question for many African orthographies. Also in this section, Dr. Jane Luega poses a question about apps for learning languages. We hope to continue this section in future issues, and invite all readers to submit comments, reflections, and questions of interest to the readership of this newsletter.

In the April issue of the newsletter we announced the coming of the website of the [African Storybook Project](#), which was successfully launched in June this year. We invite you to have a look at this exciting project to put African stories on one website and support mother tongue literacy endeavours through supplementary readers in many African languages. In the next issue we will report on some of the experiences of this project after two years in operation.

We wish you good reading and the best in your research efforts. Keep us posted with submissions for the April 2015 newsletter (next deadline is February 28, 2015).

With best regards,



Yours,

Juliet Tembe,
Editor





Upcoming Conferences and Events

9th Pan African Conference in conjunction with 10th RASA National Conference, Cape Town, South Africa, September 2015

The 2015 conference will be held from 2–5 September 2015 in Cape Town, South Africa. It will be held jointly with the national conference of the Reading Association of South Africa (RASA). The contact address for enquiries is: belinda.chapman@uct.ac.za. Themes of the conference as well as the Call for Abstracts will be [announced here](#).

International conference Globalising Sociolinguistics, Leiden, Netherlands, June 2015

A combined European, American and British dominance is known to exist in sociolinguistic theory-making. This results in difficulties in using several dominant sociolinguistic models outside their ‘western’ geographical domain. Most researchers working outside this domain are keenly aware of this, and hence objections to this dominance are regularly vented by them. This conference addresses mismatches between mainstream sociolinguistic models and non-Anglo-Western sociolinguistic settings. Papers are invited on sociolinguistic issues, from various areas in the world, which challenge or expand mainstream theories. Both theoretical and empirical contributions are welcome. [More information](#).

Confirmed plenary speakers:

- Florian Coulmas, Director of the German Institute for Japanese Studies, Tokyo. Associate Editor of the International Journal of the Sociology of Language; Author of *Sociolinguistics*.
- Maarten Mous, Professor of African Linguistics and Head of the Department of African Languages and Cultures, Leiden University. His research interests include Language & Identity and Cushitic and Bantu languages. Author of “The making of a mixed language: The case of Ma’á/Mbugu” (2003).
- Daming Xu, Professor of Chinese Linguistics at the University of Macau; Co-editor of *Industrialization and the Re-structuring of Speech Communities in China and Europe* (2010).
- Reem Bassiouney, Associate Professor of Linguistics at the American University of Cairo; Author of “Functions of Code-Switching in Egypt” (2006) and “Arabic Sociolinguistics” (2008).

Dates: 18–20 June 2015

Venue: Leiden University, Netherlands



Call for journal articles and book chapters

Exploring 'Democracy in Nigeria @ 15': Essays on language and politics

In May 2014, Nigeria celebrated the fifteenth anniversary of uninterrupted practice of civil rule. This volume therefore seeks to explore the roles played or being played by language in building a stronger, stable and sustainable democracy in Nigeria. How have stakeholders employed the facilities of language in political or governance activities? Scholarly and empirically-based contributions that address this concern are invited with the specific focus on investigating the use of language in Nigerian political space between 1999 and 2014. Only papers that address the focus/theme will be accepted for peer-review and possible inclusion in the volume. The papers must report on research in the areas of political linguistics, sociolinguistics, discourse analysis and the new media.

While the main focus of the volume is political discourse and civic engagement, papers are welcome from related topics that focus on 'Democracy in Nigeria at 15'. In keeping with the focus, researchers submitting abstracts are encouraged to equally consider Nigeria socio-cultural dimensions relevant to their research.

Well-researched and scholarly papers of not more than 8,000 words written in the latest APA Style guide, Times New Roman 12pt should be forwarded to the emails below by October 30th 2014 at the latest. Only successful papers, following the double-blinded peer reviewed process, will be included in the volume. Notifications will be sent as soon as reviewers' reports are received. Proposed Publication Date: Early 2015. Editors: 'Tunde Opeibi, Chemnitz University of Technology, Germany; Segun Awonusi, University of Lagos, Nigeria; Josef Schmied, Chemnitz University of Technology, Germany; Presley Ifukor, University of Münster, Germany.

Your abstract (200 words max) and full paper should be forwarded to the email(s) below:
bopeibi@unilag.edu.ng; tunde@hrz.tu-chemnitz.de; pifukor@yahoo.com

Deadline: 30 October, 2014

The Discourse of Digital Civic Engagement: Perspectives from the Developing World

Civic engagement has been the focus of scholarly publications in recent times (Bennet, 2008; Norris, 2009; McGaughey & Ayers 2003; Solo, 2014). Perspectives of scholars on this subject differ as their discipline orientation. This book approaches the subject from the linguist's perspective, examining the discursive aspect. Discourse analytic angles to civic engagements, such as critical discourse analysis, discursive pragmatics and semiotics, multimodal discourse analysis, and computer-mediated discourse analysis will be engaged by contributors. This collection will focus on the developing world where in recent times, the digital media have been playing prominent roles in political activism.



Submission Procedure: The abstracts/proposals should be 300–500 words in length (excluding bibliography) in Microsoft Word format. An abstract/proposal should contain the following information:

- (a) Title of proposed chapter
- (b) Name of authors(s)
- (c) E-mail address and affiliation
- (d) Specific details on area to be covered

They should be submitted to Rotimi Taiwo (ferotai@yahoo.com) or Tunde Opeibi (drtundeopeibi@gmail.com) on or before 15th November 2014. The editors will then make a selection of abstracts/proposals in order to ensure coherence of the whole volume. The authors will be notified about the acceptance of their abstracts/proposals by 30th December, 2014. The authors of accepted abstracts will be expected to contribute a chapter of maximum 9,000 words in length (including notes and bibliography) and to peer review two other chapters. A first draft of the individual papers will be due by 1st April, 2015, after which the draft papers will be submitted to internal and external peer review. This book is tentatively scheduled for publishing in last quarter of 2015 by Nova Publishers, USA. Please e-mail all enquiries and proposal submissions to: ferotai@yahoo.com or drtundeopeibi@gmail.com.

Deadline: 15 November 2014

Call for papers for the ACALAN journal *Kuwala*

Well-researched papers are invited to submission for publication in the journal *Kuwala*, a multi-disciplinary and peer-reviewed journal, published by the African Academy of Languages, ACALAN, a specialized institution of the African Union. Focus areas include: African Languages and Sustainable Development; African languages, Human Language Technologies and the cyberspace; Mother tongue/bilingual/multilingualism education: Good practices and challenges; Language Policies and Politics of Language: Good practices and challenges; Terminology and orthography development; and Research on African Languages in Africa and the Diaspora.

We accept submissions in English, French or any African language volunteers are welcome to help us translate the papers (especially the ones in African languages) into other languages like English, French and Portuguese. Papers are accepted all year round and publication is free; however, each author will make arrangement for collection of copies of the journal after publication. You can send your papers to: kuwala@acalan.org.



Publications

A special issue of the *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*

A special issue on “Multilingual Literacy and Social Change in African Communities” has just been published (Volume 35, Issue 7, December 2014). In the introductory article, Bonny Norton, who guest edited the special issue, examines the diverse contributions with reference to the United Nations’ Millennium Development Goals, formulated in 2000 to “make poverty history” by 2015. In his article, based on his keynote at the 2013 British Council Language and Development Conference in Cape Town, Ayo Bamgbose argues convincingly that language is central in the struggle for educational progress, gender equality, and improved health. Pinky Makoe and Carolyn McKinney highlight continuities in language practices in post-apartheid South African schools, while Margaret Early and Bonny Norton address the challenges of teaching through English as medium in Uganda. As discussed by Ari Sherris and colleagues, programs like *School for Life*, which validate the local languages of out-of-school Ghanaian youth, are exemplary, and can be contrasted with the troubling pedagogical practices identified by Christina Higgins in her article on HIV/AIDS educational research in Tanzania. The validation of local knowledge is also a theme in the article by Elizabeth Namazzi and Maureen Kendrick, who insightfully address multimodal educational practices in Ugandan child-headed households. The special issue concludes with an article by Polo Lemphane and Mastin Prinsloo, who provide a window on the future, cautioning that the digital literacy practices of diverse youth can be indexical of social inequalities. The special issue also includes a book review of Kate Parry’s 2009 edited book *Reading in Africa: Beyond the School*, reviewed by Espen Stranger-Johannessen, and a review of Marlene Asselin and Ray Doiron’s 2013 book, *Linking Literacy and Libraries in Global Communities* reviewed by Shelley Jones.

Commentary

Global Libraries: Infinite Possibilities, Language and Identities

Decades ago, libraries were stereotypically viewed as reading spaces characterized by their collection of resources basically in print and other physical non-book formats. Going down memory lane, libraries then seemed like entities with limited access where visiting patrons would often be required to tender prove of identification before gaining entrance. Constant library users/ patrons can rekindle this information seeking protocols often encountered in conventional libraries, which, however, are not out of place when considering efficiency, security and the decorum to be ensured.

With the prevalence of internet in practically every imaginable endeavor, an information-driven society smothered by constant information search in computer-aided devices, resulted in most library operations and services correspondingly been upgraded. As a result, libraries are now defined with less emphasis on them as physical space, but more as spaces without borders or boundaries with implications that the various documented information resources of the world some of which serve as heritage collections alongside their semantic representations are no more



entirely exclusive. The disintegration of language barriers has furthermore been enabled through translation facilities to innumerable audience enabled by Information technology devices which libraries have taken advantage of with other information centers. Information can be encoded and interpreted electronically.

Libraries with these technological capabilities have enhanced their roles as knowledge managers by capturing, uploading and defining electronic local contents for easy information retrieval by creating standardized taxonomies, metadata and controlled vocabulary. Some indigenous contents which are expressions of local language and heritage across the globe which otherwise were unknown can enjoy wide distribution and access in consideration to free information content, while delineating infringement on ownership rights. Special libraries, archives and language resource centers can take advantage of this to establish global contact, connections and impact. Like *eureka*, the relatively open, 'free' and easy access to information source and content has permeated domains leading to networking, partnerships and collaborations.

At this juncture, I give credence to the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) in its steps towards promoting access to knowledge using various platforms to accomplish key initiatives, which includes Multilingualism and Access to Cultural Heritage. At its 79th World Library Congress held in August, 2013 at Singapore, IFLA raised the number of official conference languages to seven, with provision for concurrent interpretations at opening sessions, closing and at special sectional meetings communicated in French, German, Russian, Spanish, Chinese (Mandarin) and Arabic other than English. Indeed, following the popular Raga Nathan's principle of librarianship, libraries are growing organisms *helping to bridge linguistic divides*.

The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions has for decades maintained sub-groups for librarians at continental / regional levels e.g. IFLA Africa section, which reflects sense of belonging and in some ways project common interest and language. Hosting of IFLA World library and information congress rotates annually among continents. The just concluded one held in August, 2014 at Lyon, France had non-French speaking participants from all over the world either rekindling or encountering other language experience.

Kathryn Philip (CLN, FISCA)

Kathryn Philip (an AILA member) is a practicing librarian at University of Uyo, Nigeria for 18 years and a volunteer community information worker.

Does marking tone always reduce fluency? A cross-linguistic project to test exhaustive orthographic tone marking

It is not uncommon for the orthographies of tone languages to mark tone exhaustively, i.e. one less accent than the number of contrastive level tones in the language – two in a three tone language; one in a two tone language.

Yet it is no exaggeration to say that, after a century of orthography development for previously unwritten languages, there is not a shred of empirical evidence based on quantitative experimentation confirming that marking tone exhaustively is a viable strategy, both in terms of



enhancing speed and accuracy in oral reading performance and in terms of contributing to comprehension. Most newly developed orthographies are based only on descriptive phonological analysis; very few researchers venture into the classroom itself to investigate the performance of readers in oral reading and spontaneous writing.

At the same time, one benefit of the enormous acceleration in tone research since the development of autosegmental phonology has been a growing awareness of how vastly different one tone system can be from another, and this observation applies as much to the functional load of tone as it does to any other aspect of the tone system. So it could be that for languages with an extremely high functional load of tone, exhaustive marking may be unavoidable, while for those with a lower functional load of tone such a strategy would be overkill. We just don't know. Discussions of this sort among fieldworkers tend to be dominated by hunches and guesswork.

Bird's (1999) experiment in Dschang, a Grassfields language of Cameroon, is a notable exception to this trend, and it has deservedly received a lot of attention in the fifteen years since it was written. Bird presents objective evidence that an existing tone orthography actually hinders fluent reading and writing. However, it should be borne in mind that it only reports the performance of eleven speakers of one language. There is a crying need for much more data of this kind from a wide variety of languages worldwide.

This project seeks to respond to this need by closely replicating Bird's experiment in as many languages as possible. The data will be measured and collected in uniform way across all the languages included in the experiment, resulting in a single cross-linguistic analysis and write-up. The overall aim is to greatly multiply the kind of data that Bird first made available, in order to provide a more comprehensive picture of the effects on reading and writing performance of marking exhaustive tone.

This research project carries no assumption that there are only two options, zero and full marking. It may well be that for many languages partial marking may be more appropriate. But the experiment proposed here does not investigate this possibility. Instead, it seeks to respond to a more general research question: Is marking tone exhaustively justified because there is a generalised problem with tonal ambiguity affecting reading fluency in the languages under investigation?

I personally plan to focus on some Togolese and Beninese languages that mark exhaustive tone, and would like to invite collaboration with colleagues working on tone languages elsewhere in the world. Each researcher is entirely responsible for funding his/her own experiment. If you would like to participate in this project, or if you'd like to know more, please contact me, David Roberts (rbrdvd@gmail.com).

Question about apps for learning languages

Babel magazine has a regular *Ask a Linguist* column, where a member of the public poses a question about language and we put it to an expert linguist. We have had the following question from a Facebook follower and think that a BAAL member should be able to answer it:



Q. Apps for learning languages are suddenly all the rage. But just how useful are they beyond absolute beginner level? I read somewhere recently that people remember things more if they use paper and pen to write things down rather than using a keyboard / tablet.

If you would be interested in publishing a 500-word answer in Babel, please email me on editors@babelzine.com with an expression of interest and a little bit about your qualifications for addressing this question.

Dr. Jane Lugea
Senior Lecturer in Applied Linguistics, University of Huddersfield

In the field

E-books and family literacy in Ethiopia

E-books and family literacy in Ethiopia is a new project funded by a grant CODE-Ethiopia (CE) received from the EIFL-PLIP (Electronic Information for Libraries-Public Library Innovation Programme). This project being the first of its kind in CE's history will be implemented in three sample community libraries: Durbetie, Fiche, and Dire Dawa Kebele 05. The project implementation period extends from June 2014 to June 2015 for a period of one year. This project addresses the critical need for mother tongue early literacy materials in rural Ethiopia by developing e-books for preschool children and providing access to them in community libraries. The major activities in implementing this project are procurement of technologies for the pilot libraries, training of librarians, production and distribution of e-books by Code Ethiopia, family and early literacy workshops in the pilot sites by involving local renowned personalities, the youth and mothers and their children, community creation of e-books by involving local youth and artists and providing access to these e-books. Impact assessment will be conducted by collecting relevant quantitative and qualitative data. The project and its results will also be communicated throughout the process.

To begin to meet the challenges of establishing digital library programmes in this new project, CLs will be supplied with computers and data projectors in order to showcase digital books for preschool children and their families. The major goal is to create six digital books, written in or translated into local languages and accessed through the computers provided. The focus of the books will be familiar stories and information with content drawn from local experiences, cultures and everyday family life. The target groups for the project are families with young children with the main emphasis on supporting early reading habits and skills. The library staff will be provided with specialized training in using the technologies as well as strategies for supporting families and early literacy.

A unique feature of this project is that in each CL participants will be invited to create two digital books that reflect their interests and their communities. These in turn will be included in the beginning collection of 12 digital books available to all the 97 C-E community libraries throughout the country.



In the news

Mbulungeni Madiba calls for the Intellectualisation of African Languages (UKZN Press)

Mbulungeni Madiba, co-ordinator of the [Multilingualism Education Project](#) (MEP) and chairperson of the [Pan South African Language Board](#), spoke recently at the [launch](#) of *Interviews with Neville Alexander: The Power of Languages Against the Language of Power* about the intellectualisation of indigenous African languages. Alexander, a revolutionary and struggle hero, [passed away in 2012](#), at the age of 75, after a long battle with cancer, but his memory was very much alive at the launch of the book. [Full story.](#)

Economic success 'drives language extinction' (BBC News)

Economic development is driving the extinction of some languages, scientists believe. A study has found that minority languages in the most developed parts of the world, including North America, Europe and Australia, are most at threat. [Full story.](#)

The Kamusi Project – an open dictionary of all languages (Beyond Niamey)

The Kamusi Project, which began as a pioneering online Swahili dictionary at Yale in 1994, is still visionary in how it plans to use technology for online dictionaries, but is out of money. [Full story.](#) [Youtube.](#)

Ebola and health information in African languages (Beyond Niamey)

Examples of how African languages are being used to inform and educate Africans about ebola. Mainly the result of separate country or individual efforts, should we be tracking these efforts with an eye to developing a data bank of such material? [Full story.](#)

Tessa Welch gives keynote address on African Storybook Project

Tessa Welch, the Project Director of the African Storybook Project, gave a keynote address on the first 18 months of the project at the African Storybook Summit held at the University of British Columbia in June, 2014. The link to the YouTube talk, and information on the summit, is given [here.](#)

Tell us about your research!

Send us a short profile (one paragraph) of the research you are undertaking on language or literacy education in Africa by February 28, 2015, for inclusion in our next issue.